DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
UNITED STATES FLEET FORCES COMMAND

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR PROPOSED HELICOPTER WINGS REALIGNMENT AND MH-60R/S HELICOPTER TRANSITION, NAVAL BASE CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) implementing procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Department of the Navy (Navy) gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been issued for the Helicopter Wings Realignment and MH-60R/S Helicopter Transition at Naval Air Station North Island (NASNI), the anchor base of the consolidated installation Naval Base Coronado (NBC), California.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide facilities and functions to support an increase in the number of fleet helicopter squadrons on the west coast to meet the objectives of the 2001 Fleet Transition Plan, 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2009 MH-60R/S Transition Plan Update, which call for a realignment of the naval force structure in the Pacific Command Area of Responsibility. In addition, the purpose of the proposed action is to achieve the required levels of operational readiness required by United States Code Title 10 Section 5062 which provides, “[t]he Navy shall be organized, trained, and equipped primarily for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea.”

The need for the proposed Helicopter Wings Realignment is to support the Navy’s re-emphasized operational focus and force structure changes in the Pacific Command Area of Responsibility in response to the 2006 QDR, which noted “[t]he fleet will have greater presence in the Pacific Ocean, consistent with the global shift of trade and transport.” Additionally, the proposed helicopter transition from older legacy helicopters to the newer MH-60R/S helicopters is necessary to maintain operational readiness of west coast helicopter squadrons.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Navy is proposing to add four helicopter squadrons (standing up three new squadrons and relocating one east coast squadron) and increase the number of helicopters homebased at NASNI by 52, from the current 151 to 203, by 2016. Most existing and future helicopter squadrons would transition to the MH-60R/S helicopters replacing older type, model, series H-60 helicopters. Eighteen older HH-60H and SH-60F helicopters would remain in use by Reserve Squadron HSC-85 due to their specific mission requirements.

The proposed action would increase helicopter operations at NASNI and at Naval Outlying Landing Field Imperial Beach (NOLF IB) by a maximum of 30%. For purposes of the EA analysis, it was assumed that at a minimum an average of 20 of the 203 helicopters would be deployed at any given time and 183 helicopters would be operating in the local operating area, resulting in a 30% increase in operations over the baseline condition. Deployment schedules continue to evolve to meet operational requirements and it is likely that deployment schedules would overlap with greater frequency and over longer time periods resulting in up to 40 helicopters deployed and therefore removed from the local operating area. Because the minimum deployment level was assumed, the 30% increase in operations represents a maximum scenario.

The proposed action would increase the NASNI base population by 800 personnel when the realignment is completed by 2016. Military personnel would increase by 738, and civilian employment would increase by 62. To support the proposed increase in homebased helicopters and transition to MH-60R/S at NASNI, new facilities, including a new approximately 112,000 square foot organizational maintenance hangar, shop space, administrative space and helicopter parking apron space, are needed to satisfy space requirements for four additional homebased squadrons. Infrastructure improvements, including electrical power upgrades, are also necessary to provide the power requirements for the more advanced MH-60R/S airframes.

ALTERNATIVES

West coast naval facilities considered for homebasing but eliminated from further analysis due to their remote locations with respect to the primary helicopter training areas (Southern

California ranges and NOLB IB) included: Naval Air Station (NAS) Fallon, located in Fallon, Nevada and NAS Whidbey Island, located on Whidbey Island, Washington. Other airfields in California that were not considered due to mission conflict or lack of capacity and facilities were Brown Field, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

An operational homebasing alternative was considered but was also eliminated from further analysis, wherein west coast naval strike groups would be augmented/supported by helicopter squadrons stationed at east coast naval facilities that would travel cross-country. A one-way, cross-country trip would take several days to accomplish due to the relatively slow speed of a rotary wing aircraft.

Homebasing location alternatives evaluated further included, Naval Air Facility El Centro, California, Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu, California and NASNI, California. NASNI was determined to be the only adequate location for the proposed action because, unlike the other homebasing alternatives considered, NASNI has extensive facilities to support four additional helicopter squadrons and provides synergy of helicopter/fleet units and operational efficiency.

Two alternatives were evaluated in the EA: Alternative A implements the helicopter wings realignment and MH-60R/S transition at NASNI and constructs the new approximately 112,000 square foot organizational maintenance hangar and supporting facilities along the helicopter flight line at the north end of NASNI. Existing buildings on the site will be removed under an independent program, the Demolition Footprint Reduction Program. Alternative A is the selected alternative.

Alternative B implements the helicopter wings realignment and MH-60 R/S transition at NASNI and constructs the new approximately 112,000 square foot organizational maintenance hangar and supporting facilities 550 feet southwest of Alternative A. Existing buildings on the site would be demolished under the proposed action with the exception of one building scheduled for removal under the Demolition Footprint Reduction Program.

The No Action Alternative would maintain the existing number of helicopter squadrons and the number of helicopters would not increase. Existing helicopter squadrons would continue to

replace the legacy aircraft with the newer MH-60R/S helicopters. No new construction would occur.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts that may occur with implementation of the proposed action would range from no impact to minor impact with no significant impacts to the environment.

The proposed action would increase helicopter operations at NASNI and at NOLF IB by a maximum of 30%. The proposed action adds approximately 35 daily helicopter flights at NASNI and approximately 19 daily helicopter flights at NOLF IB.

The proposed action would not result in significant noise impacts. The Navy prepared a noise study in 2010 that included the prospective aircraft operations (helicopter and fixed-wing) and the resulting noise environment at NASNI and NOLF IB in 2020. This study was made available to the public during the public comment period and was included in the Final EA as an appendix. The 2010 noise study assumed a 30% increase in helicopter operations, and thus includes the proposed action. The 2010 noise study developed noise contours for the prospective 2020 scenario that show a slight reduction in the total land area under the 65 dB Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) noise contours at NASNI as compared with the baseline. The proposed action would slightly expand the 2010 baseline 65 dB CNEL noise contour at NOLF IB, but this would be contained almost entirely within the installation boundaries and would not extend to populated areas. This minimal increase in the noise contour footprint means that the proposed action would not noticeably increase noise levels at NOLF IB. NASNI and NOLF IB have a suite of policies, procedures, and programs along with specific course rules to promote measures to minimize aircraft noise.

Temporary noise generated by delivery trucks during the construction period would be minimized by limiting travel to regular daytime work hours and would be consistent with traffic noise in an urban environment.

Estimated air emissions associated with the proposed action would be below the *de minimis* threshold levels for conformity with the Clean Air Act and would not result in an exceedance of the San Diego Air Pollution Control District’s emission budgets.

There would be no significant impact on air quality. The Navy has prepared a Record of Non-Applicability for Clean Air Act conformity.

An additional 863 average daily traffic trips would be generated by the proposed action. This represents 2% or less of NASNI traffic and would not be substantial enough to directly affect delay times at intersections or levels of service. The proposed action would contribute minor additive traffic impacts to existing cumulative traffic impacts, for which mitigation measures were previously analyzed in the 2008 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Developing Home Port Facilities for Three Nimitz-Class Aircraft Carriers in Support of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

No direct impacts to surface water would result from the proposed action. With the use of best management practices and stormwater management, soil erosion and sedimentation would not occur or would be minimized.

Wildlife habitats and vegetation at NASNI and NOLF IB would not be directly affected by the proposed action because no new construction would occur in any natural habitat areas or plant communities. The increase in helicopter operations may increase potential bird/animal aircraft strike hazard (BASH) incidents at NASNI and NOLF IB. However, based on current levels, this increase would not be significant. While significant impacts to threatened and endangered species are not expected, noise impacts may affect but are not likely to adversely affect the California least tern, western snowy plover, light-footed clapper rail and least Bell’s vireo. The Navy consulted informally with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding this determination. USFWS concurred with the Navy’s findings on June 3, 2011, contingent upon incorporation of a breeding season restriction on construction within 500 feet of the California least tern nesting area at NASNI. Construction for the selected alternative would not take place within 500 feet of the nesting area.

The proposed action would have no effect on coastal uses or resources identified in the California Coastal Management Program. The Navy filed a Coastal Consistency Negative Determination during preparation of the EA. The California Coastal Commission concurred with the Negative Determination on June 3, 2011.

Based on the analysis of environmental impacts, the proposed action would not cause disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects on low income or minority populations or environmental health or safety risks that would disproportionately affect children.

Commander, Navy Region Southwest (CNRSW), in accordance with the CNRSW San Diego Metro Area Programmatic Agreement, has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the implementation of the proposed organizational maintenance hangar construction and demolition at NASNI.

The proposed action would have no effect on existing land use and would have minor economic benefits. The proposed action would result in minor increases in the use of utilities and hazardous materials. The new facilities would be designed to comply with Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design Silver standards and would be in compliance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Construction and operation of the proposed action would comply with applicable federal, state and local regulations.

Cumulative impacts of the proposed action including past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, would not be significant.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Navy released the Draft EA for public review on February 25, 2011. The public comment period was initiated with the publication of a Notice of Availability of the Draft EA, including notice of a Public Information Meeting, in local and regional English and Spanish language newspapers starting on February 25, 2011. The Draft EA was available on the Navy's website at www.cnic.navy.mil/cnrsw, and at local libraries. The comment period was scheduled to last 30 days. However, in response to requests from local officials and individuals, the Navy issued a press release on April 7, 2011 and published display ads in both English and Spanish newspapers announcing an extension of the public comment period until April 25, 2011. During the extended comment period, the EA remained available on the Navy's website and at local libraries. Public comments received were addressed in the Final EA.

FINDING

After review of the EA, prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and Navy procedures for implementing NEPA (32 CFR 775), the Navy finds that implementing the proposed action of homebasing four additional helicopter squadrons, and construction of a new organizational maintenance hangar with supporting facilities and personnel at NASNI will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

A copy of the EA, including this FONSI, can be obtained from: Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest, ATTN: Project Manager, Helicopter Wings Realignment and MH-60R/S Helicopter Transition, Code: RUE20.TB, 2730 McKean Street Bldg. 291, San Diego, CA 92136

8/17/11
DATE

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